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ABSTRACT

Student teaching is only a successful experience if it assists the prospective teacher in developing effective classroom control techniques and evolving a personal teaching style. In order to make student teaching useful, four factors should be considered. First, profiles should be developed on the student teacher and the cooperating teacher before the student is placed, in order to match personalities, philosophical and disciplinary approaches, and style. Second, teacher education programs should emphasize classroom control and teaching style and familiarize prospective teachers with the theory and practice of positive/negative reinforcement. Third, educators need to address the particular problems of urban schools, especially in the areas of discipline and classroom control. Fourth, competency tests should be developed for student teachers to determine their progress in the areas of classroom control and discipline, and particularly the acquisition of theoretical knowledge. (CG)

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AN ESSAY

STUDENT TEACHING: A SEARCH FOR CONTROL AND STYLE

by

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It was a New York City ghetto school. The enrollment was 99 percent Black. The school's daily modus operandi was authoritarian.

Kate, the student teacher, had planned her lesson carefully and thoughtfully, and her appearance was quite professional as she stood before the second grade pupils. But she could not bring the children to order. "Tell them to SHUT," yelled Ms. Smith, the cooperating teacher. But Kate just stood there -- dumbfounded, mute. She could not bring herself to speak to the children as Ms. Smith had directed. Nor could she get the class quiet so she could begin. So, Ms. Smith yelled, "SHUT!" The class became quiet, at least momentarily, but began to buzz again as Kate again attempted to begin the lesson. Following a brief conference between the two teachers, Ms. Smith resumed control of the class and proceeded with an optional lesson. The devastated Kate spent the remainder of the class period observing Ms. Smith and, in her silent thoughts, considered discontinuing her pursuit of a teaching career.

Trying to be helpful, Mr. Hackworth, a friendly teacher confided: "I get my students quiet by giving them goodies -- candy, etc.; others had suggestions ranging from punishment to punching.

After conferring with Kate and other student teachers enrolled in a seminar, I concluded that student teaching is not a successful experience unless it helps the prospective teacher become immediately effective in classroom control, and begin to evolve a personal teaching style. These two goals are virtually inseparable, and if they are not achieved, not much teaching and learning can be expected, especially when the student teacher is placed in the public schools of America's urban ghettoes. These goals, therefore, become an interesting challenge to the student teacher, cooperating teacher, and college supervisor -- particularly in view of new evidence which suggests that student teaching appears to have no noteworthy impact on the development of teachers.

First, what are meant by classroom control and teaching style?

In general terms, classroom control means developing and maintaining an environment that is conducive to learning; in specific terms, it means developing rules regarding behavior, developing effective learning plans, carefully choosing methodologies, appropriately organizing the class, and providing good administrative/supportive services. Beyond these, classroom control means influencing children toward the achievement of class objectives, and intervening in any classroom situation that hampers or threatens progress. Intervention may mean discipline, handling interruptions, encouraging positive behavior, and curbing negative behavior.

Style is the teacher's distinctive method of acting or

performing in the classroom; it is the way in which the teacher interacts with students; it is ultimately derived from personality, beliefs, attitudes, values, and social interaction. Perhaps the most meaningful description of style is suggested in questions of the following type: Is the teacher austere or affable, permissive or restrictive, warm and friendly or cold and distant, quiet and patient or loud and anxious, dynamic and forceful or casual and low-keyed, light hearted and clever or serious and humorless? Or, what happens when two teachers, with equal education and preparation, are given the same lesson and the same class? How different are their styles, and how much more effective is one than the other?

Second, why are classroom control and teaching style especially important in the public schools of America's urban ghettoes?

Because that is where the new teacher is most likely to be placed; the jobs are there, and the needs are overwhelming. While this is the simplistic answer, the plight of America's urban ghettoes is well known: impoverished Blacks and other minorities, unemployment, drugs, social decay, violence and crime. Ghetto schools have related problems, which are also well known: lack of discipline, drugs, sex, violence, and below grade-level achievement. The lack of discipline is pervasive and accentuates other problems. Schools, more often than not, respond with a "get tough" posture, which becomes pervasive because many principals and teachers believe it is the only way to run schools for ghetto children. In schools where this belief is intense, teachers are

expected to become tough disciplinarians. In extreme cases, it manifests itself in the taking on of ghetto characteristics and the use of negative motivation and reinforcement. Yet, this heavy reliance on authority and toughness does not adequately address the problem -- despite isolated claims -- and often alienates the bright, young, aspiring teacher who believes that it is important to steer children in the direction of self discipline. Unfortunately, some of these teachers are lost to the profession early in their careers while others move on to a different school or system.

To be sure, teaching in a ghetto school can be very difficult, and the experience is one for which teachers should be especially prepared. Yet, what many teachers have learned from formal studies is often quite useless.

But what about a "get tough," authoritarian approach? Is it the answer for ghetto schools. Sandford Rietman, a noted educator suggests not:

> "Teachers who attempt to become authoritarian will fail with many children today. Such an approach to teacher-student relations succeeded in the past because the community and the extended family -- institutions that are waning in influence today -- supported restricted childhood and adolescent behavior. Even then, it never succeeded as well as traditionalists who urge getting tough believe."

Educators suspect that permissive child-rearing practices account for this development. Moreover, some of them think that permissiveness is increasingly the choice of middle class parents who believe that considerable freedom is essential to developing independence, an open mind, and the ability to adjust to change. It is likely that Benjamin Spock and his

widely read book, Baby and Child Care, gave considerable impetus to increased permissiveness in child-rearing.

A number of ghetto children also experience permissive upbringings but for a different reason. The best example is seen in the experience of "latch key" children whose parents have to work or are indifferent to child supervision. Of course, what happens too often in the ghetto is the development of Black youths as depicted by Claude Brown in his "Manchild Harlem," adapted from his book, Mandchild in the Promised Land. This kind of development makes the tough job tougher in ghetto schools.

Third, regarding the questionable value of student teaching, a University of Wisconsin study, "The Impact of the Student Teaching Experience on the Development of Teacher Perspectives," suggests that ". . .individual intention and institutional constraint played significant roles in affecting the development of student teacher perspectives . ." Student teaching at best had no influence on the development of these perspectives.

THE FIRST OBJECTIVE

There is no doubt that control in the classroom is essential from the outset. Moreover, establishing discipline is often the teacher's first objective -- aimed at addressing whatever situation exists. Control from this perspective is a matter of reality that the beginning teacher faces in the ghetto school; and that includes the student teacher. However, an additional set of circumstances further complicates the situation as far as student teaching is concerned. The student teacher has to

observe and work in someone else's classroom, face an already established classroom operation, and is expected to control a group of children whose response patterns are no doubt conditioned by the experienced teacher's personal style. In addition, students seem forever eager to "try" the student teacher.

A NEW EMPHASIS

Developing important competencies in classroom control are often lost or subsumed under a broader competency-designation, classroom management, which emphasizes organization, environment, administration, etc. While these are important, prospective teachers for America's inner-city, public schools need to be fortified with a thorough understanding of discipline: the source of problems, how to prevent them, and how to handle them. Knowing about these aspects of discipline and developing appropriate skills are essential before any real teaching and learning can take place. There is quite a repertory of effective techniques, and also a list of ineffective techniques which all teachers should avoid.

So, if there are answers to the discipline problem, why is it such a major dilemma? Is it that teacher education programs are not emphasizing these techniques? Is there a gap between theory and practice. Do we need something else -- something new? Or is it that teachers are so pressured by disciplinary problems that there is not sufficient time to analyze situations and approach them from knowledge? Or do they simply respond instantaneously, which often means yelling, treking to the principal's office, or taking some other

negative action. Perhaps we do need new answers.

In the meantime, why not consider some new steps that would give classroom control a new emphasis for urban schools, and assign it greater prominence in any scheme of competency-priorities for the development of teachers. The new emphasis should include a practical as well as theoretical understanding of disciplinary techniques, and especially regarding positive and negative reinforcement as a means of modifying behavior -- including the improvement of learning.

Tough teachers in the classroom who mete out punishment and control by fear are not the answer; nor is the naive use of the "gold star" when it is not valued by students. More sophistication in classroom control, including adequate attention to discipline, may be the answer; with it, future teachers -- those with great potentials and who are truly motivated to teach -- would not be as reluctant to work in inner-city schools, or to remain in them.

AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION

References to teaching style are rarely seen in educational literature. Nevertheless, its importance should be recognized and considred in pre-service and in-service teacher training because:

1. it is related to effectiveness in classroom control and learning;
2. it is a factor in learning palatability; and
3. it is a factor in personal satisfaction for the teacher.

The importance of discussing style or being concerned

with it, appears to be frilly to some educators. Yet, it is as fundamental to teaching as anything else: it develops around individual personalities and value systems. Although its development should not become a preoccupation with the student teacher, it does become an important consideration under the pressure of a school's posture of toughness. A dilemma could also exist when a class is intensely conditioned by the cooperating teacher's personal style, and especially when the student teacher finds it so different from anything he/she wishes to consider emulating -- even for the time being. The following account of a seminar follow-up session illustrates the point:

> John, the student teacher, said: "Mr. Able, my cooperating teacher, talks absolutely too much -- admonishing, scolding, correcting, directing." "So, you're uncomfortable with his approach," I said. "Yes," said John, "but I am worrying about what I'll do when my time comes to take over the class. I simply can not bring myself to talk that much, although it seems to work for Mr. Able most of the time; it wouldn't be right for me, perhaps not for the children either."

This case was clearly a mismatch of the two teachers and perhaps should not have existed. Nevertheless, John began searching for ways in which to interact with the children -- something he thought would be effective and also give him personal satisfaction. He simply could not wait for his personal style to develop over a period of time. He was forced to think of himself -- what he was

like as a person. Should he speak softly and carry a big stick? Or should he yell with a pencil in his hand.

Unquestionably, John had to think of himself and his growth; that is what student teaching is about; and emulating someone else was not the answer. I cannot recall accurately a quotation which relates to this point, but it says the following in effect: should you fail to be yourself, and you do not succeed in your efforts to be someone else, then you are nobody.

THE CRUCIAL BEGINNING

Most teacher education programs have approximately two years (four semesters) of professional laboratory or their equivalent by some other designation, which includes teaching in the final year. These pre-service laboratories have the major task of helping to develop the professional educator.

First-year Laboratory. -- The first-year laboratory is the initial step; it involves largely theory and observation, and addresses student development in several competency areas -- methods and materials, curriculum development and lesson planning, classroom management, etc. There is, however, limited practice -- mainly in simulated situations. Rarely does classroom control claim as much attention as these and other competencies; style is rarely if ever included.

Many educators place their first priority on curriculum development and spend considerable time on curricula

prescribed by local boards of education. Dealing with board curricula, however, should not be too difficult inasmuch as teacher editions of curriculum guides contain professionally prepared lesson plans for each curriculum area and for each grade level.

Teacher educators are appropriately concerned about developing teaching effectiveness in basic skills and content areas. Even with the concern and considerable attention to these areas, consider the fact that the drop-out rate in inner-city schools is quite high, and students on the average are achieving below grade level. It should also be remembered that effective learning in basic areas will depend upon the extent to which the beginning teacher develops confidence in his/her ability to master techniques of classroom control, and to interact well with children.

The first-year laboratory, therefore, should provide prospective teachers with a repertory of control-options for the classroom, and help them become conscious at this stage regarding who they are in terms of beliefs, attitudes and values that are likely to influence their teaching perspectives. This consciousness forms a base from which the prospective teacher can evolve an effective personal teaching style.

The path to this kind of professional and personal development can be frustratingly difficult. Especially is this the case when the prospective teacher brings to the classroom the idealized values learned in psychology courses,

and when the school's predominant mode of discipline and teacher-pupil interaction are tough, authoritarian, and sometimes negative. But there are opposite models, even in ghetto schools. The following observation report describes such a model:

> It was a sixth grade class; students appeared to be self-directed; there was easy socialization and considerable activity -- writing assignments and individual projects. It was a well-run classroom but, on first inspection, could have been viewed as chaotic.
>
> Mr. Moon, the cooperating teacher, was quite busy too -- posting students' work, which he had evaluated and graded, and talking to individual students as he moved from one thing to another. He dominated and used authority only in the sense that he had planned well and expected his students to do the work required; otherwise, the children were on their own and saw the teacher as their chief resource person who monitored and evaluated their work.
>
> All of a sudden, an argument between two students, Mary and Derek, errupted into a fight with both of them battling it out on the floor. Mr. Moon walked over, pulled them up, took them to a small work space in the suite and began talking. While he could not be heard, it was clear that he was attempting to appeal to their reason. It was soon over, and Mary and Derek were back at their work

It should be pointed out that this is the way Mr. Moon dealt with most if not all disciplinary problems in his class.

The typical teacher response to such incidents at the school was to march the involved students off to the principal's office immediately.

Perhaps prospective teachers should have more opportunities to see several clearly defined models which are successfully functioning in ghetto schools. They do exist but need more attention in teacher education programs. The first-year professional laboratory does some of this; perhaps more could be done.

Student Teaching. -- The second-year laboratory is perhaps the crucial point of development for prospective teachers: it requires rapid development as they begin applying what they have learned about a wide range of competencies; and much will depend upon efforts of the student teacher, notwithstanding the careful scrutiny of an experienced teacher -- the cooperating teacher. Further, it is quite likely that the student teacher will grow and develop more rapidly over two semesters than will be the case during any similar time-span for the remainder of his/her teaching career; at least, that is the way it should be, despite studies which suggest otherwise.

To reach this growth potential, it is extremely important that student teachers have some notion of classroom control and style from the outset. They should raise a very basic,"down-to-earth" question: How should I relate to my pupils in ways that get the job done and that are personally satisfying. The question's implication is that the

prospective teacher should begin early to identify methods and techniques with which he/she can identify and develop into his/her own -- not the cooperating teacher's, the college supervisor's, or anybody else's. Furthermore, the cooperating teacher and other assisting personnel should encourage student teachers to go through considerable introspection -- looking honestly at their strengths and weaknesses, values and personalities. This kind of encouragement is reinforced when cooperating teachers and supervisors are patient and not to quick to be judgemental.

A FINAL WORD

What is to be concluded from this essay?

First, profiles should be developed on the student teacher and the cooperating teacher before the student teacher is placed. These profiles should include personality characteristics, philosophical leanings, preferred disciplinary approaches, and style. It is then possible to effect a match-up which at least places the two teachers in the same "ball park."

Second, teacher education programs should place special emphasis on classroom control and style in consideration of existing knowledge and experience; they should especially familiarize prospective teachers with the theory and practice of positive/negative reinforcement as a means of modifying behavior -- including the improvement of learning; and any gaps between theory and practice should be closed.

Third, educators should call for new research which

address the peculiar problems of urban schools, especially those which relate to discipline and classroom control. Answers simply must be found to facilitate more effective learning in inner-city schools.

Fourth, develop more effective competency tests to measure student development in classroom control and discipline; at least, develop more effective means to measure the extent to which students have acquired the essential theoretical knowledge. Obviously, student teaching will continue to be the most important test of student development in the application of theory.

In general terms, there ought to be a new, conscious effort on the part of all concerned to work towards facilitating student teachers' total development and placing a high priority on helping them develop the art and science of classroom control, including style.

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